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Book Review: *America: Our Next Chapter: Tough Questions, Straight Answers* By Chuck Hagel with Peter Kaminsk

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America: Our Next Chapter: Tough Questions, Straight Answers. By Chuck Hagel with Peter Kamin-sky. New York: Ecco Press, 2008. xi + 306 pp. Index. \$25.95 cloth.

In an era in which Americans think politicians will say whatever they think the voters want to hear, Chuck Hagel stands out. The Nebraska Republican who declined to run for a third term in the U.S. Senate in 2008 has long been known for saying what he thinks, even when his opinions may diverge markedly from his party's positions.

In *America: Our Next Chapter*, Hagel presents his take on where the nation stands and where he thinks it is—and should be—headed. The volume reflects his interest in history, his Nebraska heritage, and the insider knowledge he's gained as a member of the Senate and its Foreign Relations Committee. More than half the book addresses international relations and U.S. foreign policy, one of Hagel's longtime and most intense interests. It criticizes America's invasion of Iraq and the way the Bush administration handled the war. Hagel voted for the resolution authorizing the invasion but writes that the president and his aides reassured him that force would be a last resort in dealing with Saddam Hussein. Today, Hagel believes he, the Congress, and the American people were deceived. Congress, he writes, was "asked to vote on a resolution based on half truths, untruths and wishful thinking."

Hagel sees the Israeli-Palestinian clash as the root of conflict in the wider Middle East and urges the United States to involve itself intensely and even-handedly in the situation. "For the most part," Hagel writes, "ideology hijacked diplomacy during the Bush administration, and statecraft gave way to a misinformed 'democracy' agenda in the region." He devotes chapters to how to handle Iran and its potential for nuclear weapons; China and its role as an emerging economic powerhouse and world power; and terrorism as a symptom of despair and resentment in underdeveloped parts of the world. Throughout, he urges a broader and more multilateral approach in America's dealings with the rest of the world.

Later chapters take on the issue of partisanship and its role in policy making. Hagel defends himself against recurrent criticisms that he did not support President Bush as a Republican senator should, writing, "I am an American first, then a Republican."

Reflecting his internationalist worldview and his traditional Republican roots, he defends free trade zones and policies, writing that the outsourcing of jobs is not only unavoidable but also positive in an interrelated world and a global marketplace.

Throughout the book, Hagel supports his positions with anecdotes from his own boyhood in Nebraska, his experiences as an infantryman in Vietnam, and experiences in

the Senate. The chapters dealing with international relations include not only history and criticism of recent policies but also suggestions for change and improvement. The chapters on domestic issues are longer on analysis and shorter on specific solutions.

However, those who agree with his positions and even those who simply admire his willingness to speak out will appreciate much of what Hagel has to say in this volume. As he has done throughout his political career, he appears generally to have said what he thinks, despite the consequences. **Charlyne Berens**, *College of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Nebraska–Lincoln*.